

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01
AGRE-00 /111 W

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R 130800Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8896
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0053

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAGR PDEV LA
SUBJECT: LPDR DOMESTIC AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

REF: A VIENTIANE 0020, B VIENTIANE 0017, C 77 VIENTIANE
A-30

SUMMARY: THE LPDR HAS LAUNCHED AN AGGRESSIVE DOMESTIC
AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM TO HELP MAKE UP FOR THE SERIOUS
RICE SHORTFALL PARTLY CAUSED BY A DROUGHT DURING THE
PRIMARY GROWING SEASON IN 1977. THE POLICY EMPHASIZES
PRODUCTION OF DRY SEASON RICE AND STARCHY SUBSTITUTE
CROPS. SECONDLY, THE POLICY ENCOURAGES LOCAL ADMINIS-
TRATORS TO ORGANIZE THE POPULATION TO DIG IRRIGATION
DITCHES TO REDUCE THEIR DEPENDENCE ON NATURAL RAINS FOR
WATER. THIRDLY, THE GOVERNMENT HAS REDUCED THE MONTHLY
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STATE STORE RATION OF RICE FROM FIFTEEN TO TEN KILO-
GRAMS OF RICE AND TWO KILOGRAMS OF STARCHY FOODS PER

PERSON.
WITH LIMITED FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES, THE LPDR IS UN-
ABLE TO IMPORT NEEDED AGRICULTURAL INPUTS SUCH AS SEEDS,
IRRIGATION PUMPS, FERTILIZERS, AND INSECTICIDES AND HAS

APPEALED FOR INTERNATIONAL AID (REFS A,B).
THIS TELEGRAM DESCRIBES THE MEASURES, APART FROM THE
INTERNATIONAL APPEAL FOR AID, THAT THE LAO GOVERNMENT
HAS TAKEN TO HELP ITSELF SOLVE ITS CURRENT FOOD CRISIS.
THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THESE MEASURES DISPROVE THE
THEORY NOW SO POPULAR WITH CERTAIN EASTERN EUROPEAN
DIPLOMATS IN VIENTIANE THAT THE LAO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

ARE RESULT OF UNWILLINGNESS TO WORK. RATHER WE BELIEVE
THE EXTENSIVE LAO EFFORTS TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL PRO-
DUCTION ARE FRUSTRATED BY THEIR UNFORTUNATE CHOICE OF

ECONOMIC SYSTEMS. END SUMMARY.

QM AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF FOOD
SELF-SUFFICIENCY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE STATED PRIORITY
GOAL OF THE LPDR. WITH THREE EXCEPTIONALLY POOR HAR-
VESTS TO ITS DISCREDIT, PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE
PHOMVIHANE HAS STEPPED UP THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN ENCOURAG-
ING PRODUCTION. IN ADDITION, THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAS
INSTRUCTED LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS TO ORGANIZE THE POPU-
LATION TO PLANT DRY SEASON RICE, TO PLANT STARCHY
SUBSTITUTE CROPS, AND TO DIG IRRIGATION DITCHES.

2. IN VIENTIANE PROVINCE, THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS
REQUIRE EVERY ADULT BETWEEN THE AGES OF FIFTEEN AND
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FIFTY TO WORK ONE DAY A WEEK IN THE FIELDS. YOUNG
PEOPLE ARE ORGANIZED TO WORK ON SPECIAL IRRIGATION
DITCH DIGGING PROJECTS (REF C) OR IN STATE FIELDS BY
THE LAO PATRIOTIC YOUTH ASSOCIATION. ADULTS MUST EITHER
WORK WITH THE GROUP FROM THEIR VILLAGE OR PLACE OF
EMPLOYMENT. IF THE PEOPLE AVOID THIS WORK ASSIGNMENT,
THEY ARE DENIED PERMISSION TO PURCHASE GOODS AT THE
STATE STORE SYSTEM. MANY LAO COMPLAIN THAT THE WORK
GANG ORGANIZERS MAKE VEILED THREATS OF ARRESTING
SLACKERS ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY DEMONSTRATE A
"REACTIONARY AND ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY ATTITUDE." OTHER
LAO LIKEN THE ACCUMULATION OF "ACHIEVEMENT POINTS" IN
THE RECORDS OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS TO THE BUDDHIST
CONCEPT OF "MAKING MERIT." NO ONE PARTICULARLY ENJOYS
THE WEEKLY FORCED LABOR, BUT EVERYONE FEELS THE PRESSURE
OF OBLIGATION.

3. VIENTIANE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES (WE HAVE RECEIVED
SOME INDICATIONS THAT OTHER PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES ARE
ALSO INVOLVED) HAVE INSTITUTED A POLICY OF "BORROWING"
FOR STATE USE THOSE PRIVATE RICE FIELDS THAT HAVE A
YEAR AROUND WATER SOURCE. FARMERS TURN THEIR LAND OVER

TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE "VOLUNTEER" WORK GANGS PLANT A DRY SEASON CROP. SOME FARMERS ARE NOT SANGUINE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL RETURN THEIR LAND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RAINY SEASON SO THAT THEY CAN PLANT A REGULAR CROP FOR THEIR OWN CONSUMPTION. IN ADDITION, THE GOVERNMENT HAS SAID THAT IT WILL NOT GIVE THE CONCERNED FARMERS FERTILIZERS TO REPLENISH THE SOIL ON THE LAND IT "BORROWED."

4. THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED RUMORS THAT THE GOVERNMENT ALSO "BORROWS" DROUGHT ANIMALS FOR USE ON CULTIVATING STATE PLOTS. IT IS A CONFIRMED POLICY, HOWEVER, THAT OWNERS ARE NOT PERMITTED TO SLAUGHTER BUFFALO OR CATTLE UNLESS THEY CAN PROVE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES THAT THE

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ANIMAL IS UNABLE TO WORK OR REPRODUCE. WHEN A FARMER DOES OBTAIN PERMISSION TO SLAUGHTER A BUFFALO, HE MUST SELL IT TO THE GOVERNMENT AT A PRICE (600 KIP PER KILO) MUCH LESS THAN HIS PRODUCTION COSTS. OFTEN TIMES THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES DO NOT PAY THE FARMER IN THE LOCAL CURRENCY BUT CREDIT HIS ACCOUNT AT THE STATE STORE. THIS IS HARDLY A BARGAIN FOR THE FARMER, AS THE STATE STORES SELDOM STOCK SUFFICIENT GOODS (REF C). INSTEAD OF DISCOURAGING FARMERS FROM SLAUGHTERING THEIR PRODUCTIVE DRAUGHT ANIMALS, THE POLICY HAS PROMPTED FARMERS TO SELL THEIR ANIMALS SECRETLY FOR FEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONFISCATE OR FORCE THEM TO SELL THE ANIMALS AT A PRICE BELOW PRODUCTION COSTS. WHEREAS NO

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AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0053/2

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

BEDF OR BUFFALO HAS BEEN SOLD OPENLY IN THE VIENTIANE
FREE MARKET SINCE THE END OF OCTOBER, ONE CAN
FURTIVELY PURCHASE MEAT FOR 3300 KIP PER KILO FROM
FARMERS WHO SELL IT DOOR TO DOOR.

5. COMMENT: WE DISAGREE WITH THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN AND
BULGARIAN (AND INDONESIAN) AMBASSADORS WHO RECENTLY
TOLD US THAT THEY FOUND THAT THE LAO ECONOMIC PROBLEMS
WERE A RESULT OF THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO WORK. THE
LPDR IS FACED WITH A CRITICAL FOOD SHORTAGE, NO CAPITAL,
AND A PIRMITIVE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM. IT HAS EXERTED
CONSIDERABLE ENERGY TO IMPOSE THE UNPOPULAR POLICY OF
GROUP LABOR ESSENTIALLY BECAUSE THE COUNTRY HAS LITTLE
MORE TO WORK WITH THAN ITS OWN PEOPLE AND THEIR LAND.
THE RESULTS HAVE NOT BEEN STAGGERING BUT ARE CERTAINLY
IMPRESSIVE. IRRIGATION DITCHES DUG BY HAND HAVE OPENED
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THOUSANDS OF HECTARES OF NEW LAND FOR DRY SEASON PLANT-
ING, AND SUBSTITUTE CROPS HAVE HELPEED TO REDUCE THE
AMOUNT OF EMERGENCY FOOD AID THE LPDR HAS REQUESTED
FROM INTERNATIONAL DONORS.

6. ALTHOUGH EMBASSY BANGKOK AND CONSULATE UDORN SHOULD
MORE PROPERLY COMMENT, WE WOULD CITE AS A CASE IN POINT
THE IMPRESSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OVER THE PSTA
TWENTY YEARS IN NORTHEAST THAILAND. THE SOIL AND
CLIMATE OF THE REGION ARE EXACTLY THE SAME AS IN LAOS,
AND ITS PEOPLE DIFFER IN NO IMPORTANT WAS FROM THE LAO.
NORTHEAST THAILAND IS A SPECIFIC AND APPLICABLE EXAMPLE
OF THE IMPRESSIVE RESULTS WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED WITH
LAO HUMAN AND GEOGRAPHIC RAW MATERIAL USING A DIFFERENT
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM. INSTEAD OF BEING "LAZY",
WE THEREFORE FAULT THE LPDR'S DOMESTIC AGRICULTURAL
POLICIES BECAUSE THEY HAVE DENIED ANOTHER POSSIBLE AND
CRITICAL ECONOMIC FACTOR THAT IS AVAILABLE TO INCREASE
PRODUCTION: ENTREPRENEURSHIP.
ROBERTS

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